

King County Fire District 41

Commissioners Jim Lloyd, Chairman, Richard Krogh and Toby Nixon

March 2011

Frequently asked questions Proposed new Finn Hill fire station

Q: Why do we need a new fire station when we already have two?

A: The new station would replace stations 24 and 25, which would be closed and sold once the new station is in service. The new station would be strategically located to shorten response times. Consolidating service areas will save money and improve fire and emergency services. Station 25 was built 50 years ago when Finn Hill was mostly rural and is located too far south and west to meet current response time standards for east Finn Hill and the north part of the district. Station 24 is staffed only at night with volunteers due to revenue shortfalls.

Q: Why are you considering a park for the site of a new fire station, why not somewhere else?

Topography, cost and the limited amount of vacant land in the area leaves few sites that would result in the best fire and emergency medical service. The high cost of land makes the purchase of private property unviable. The District originally selected surplus property at Finn Hill Jr. High School for the station. The difficulty of building on the site caused the projected cost of the station to grow to \$4.5 million and the site was not pursued.

Q: How long have you been working on this site?

The Fire District and King County Parks worked most of 2010 to reach a draft letter of agreement about the feasibility of a fire station on a 1.8 acre corner of the 218 acre Big Finn Hill Park at NE 138th and Juanita Dr. The agreement calls for the Fire District to include 20 parking stalls for park users. The intent was to get public feedback before finalizing the agreement, which is still in draft form.

Q: Why didn't you tell us sooner?

Given the experience with the Finn Hill Jr. High School site, commissioners wanted to be sure the Big Finn Hill Park site was feasible before moving forward with a public discussion. The Commissioners briefed the Kirkland City Council twice in 2010, and contacted the Denny Creek Neighborhood Association and the Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance in December 2010 about the potential for a fire

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station at the Park. The District looked into possible restrictions on the site due to wetlands, traffic engineering, utilities, zoning, stormwater run-off and soil conditions.

Q: Why weren't residents notified ahead of time that a backhoe would be scraping vegetation from three spots in the park? When will you restore the damage?

The Fire District and King County Parks were as surprised as neighbors and park users and understand why people were upset. Work by a backhoe was needed for soils testing to determine if the site is feasible. However, the contractor did not follow requirements of the permit for the work, which state that the Fire District and Parks must be notified in advance of the work so we could notify neighbors and park users.

On March 3 representatives of the Denny Creek Neighborhood Alliance met on the site with the Fire District's Toby Nixon and Ken Davidson along with a King County representative and the landscape architect. They discussed how the site will be restored. A final restoration plan will be ready soon.

Q: Will you preserve the trees on site if the fire station is built here?

The project permit will require a tree plan for the site and require that significant trees—six inches in diameter or larger—be retained or replaced. Early design work sets the fire station far enough back on the site that all trees and vegetation will remain along Juanita Dr. The plan is to leave as many trees as possible and augment trees and vegetation to screen the building and parking.

Q: How much will it cost?

The Fire District is working with a rough estimate of \$3.5 million based on square footage of the station.

Q: How will it be paid for?

The Fire District has put \$1.5 million in reserve for a new fire station and will sell Fire Stations 24 and 25 once the new station is built. Depending on the economy, the estimated value of the two properties is between \$600 thousand and \$1 million. In a best case scenario, that gives the district \$2.5 million of the needed \$3.5 million cost of construction. Based on input from constituents, commissioners would decide how to finance about \$1 million of the cost. For example, the formula for generating \$1 million is a temporary levy of 5 cents per every thousand dollars of assessed value for five years. Even with a small levy, property taxes will go down after the annexation June 1, 2011

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Q: What will happen when the annexation is official and this area is part of Kirkland?

The Fire District commissioners' terms will end early, the district will dissolve, and its assets will be handed over to the City of Kirkland. The District currently contracts with the City of Kirkland for fire and medical emergency staffing, so it should be a seamless transition with no change for residents.

Q: What will a new station look like?

Because it is early in the process there is no final design. However, the goal is to build a one-story facility that is integrated into the forested setting of the park with a low-impact design. The 8,900 square foot building would have three bays and would be set back on the 1.8 acre site so that all trees and vegetation along Juanita Dr. remain. The intent is to leave as many significant trees as possible and to augment trees and vegetation to screen the facility. The new fire station would look very different than other fire stations in the area.

Q: How much equipment and how many staff will be on the site?

The station will have one engine and one aid car initially. It will be staffed 24/7 by three firefighters who are also trained emergency medical technicians.

Q: How noisy and how busy will it be? What about lights at night?

Based on the number of calls Stations 24 and 25 have responded to in recent years, the new station will be sent out on approximately 700 calls per year, the fewest number of calls for any station in Kirkland. There will be sirens on an average of two or three per day. Since the staff is so small there should not be any measurable increase in traffic on Juanita Dr. There could be a small amount of noise from daily operation of the station but it is not likely to be significant. The site will be lighted at night.

Q: Juanita Drive is treacherous during cold weather. Isn't this a dangerous place for fire trucks and aid cars?

Station 25 uses Juanita Drive during snow and ice. Juanita Drive at 138th NE is not considered to be more hazardous than the section where Station 25 is now. Firefighters are very well-trained drivers, and mount chains whenever snow or ice is expected so they'll be sure of being able to respond as quickly as possible in emergencies.

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Q: Won't it be dangerous for fire trucks to be coming and going on 138th NE?

Thorough traffic studies will be done in which solutions such as an automatically-activated signal or full signaling of the intersection may be considered. However, the intersection meets standards for visibility, is used daily by residents, and is not known as a site of a large number of accidents. Emergency vehicles with flashing lights will likely have an easier time exiting onto Juanita Drive than personal vehicles have today. It is also likely that an automatically-activated signal will be installed. Full signaling of the intersection would add about \$250 thousand to the cost.